

Farm Inspections

As more markets go to producer-only markets or limit the amount of reselling taking place at the market, the matter of fair, objective enforcement of those rules becomes an issue. Some markets have instituted farm inspections to enforce these rules. An on-farm visit is conducted and recorded to determine the crops a person is growing, the apparent amount they are growing, and any other evidence of production that can be objectively recorded.

Before a market decides to utilize farm inspections they should be aware that inspections are not easy and take a great deal of time. The person(s) doing the inspections should be above reproach and knowledgeable. **The inspector should bring the information back to a governing body that actually makes the decision rather than it being an in-field decision.**

With season extension efforts on both ends of the traditional growing season, determining a producer's crops, varieties, and capacity may be difficult with one visit. In June there will be little evidence of the fall pumpkin crop, for instance. Other methods such as a sketch of the farm with crop plan for each field or evidence of seed orders may be utilized.

Whether the market requires farm visits or allows for visits as the result of a complaint, this requirement needs to be spelled out in the rules. Every producer needs to sign off on this requirement and give permission for their farm to be inspected. This is best done as part of the membership agreement before the producer becomes part of the market. To avoid hard feelings it is suggested that all farms get inspected over the season.

A reporting form should be developed that specifies:

- The name of the producer and contact information
- The location of the farm
- The date and time of the inspection
- The weather on the inspection day
- Who was present during the inspection
- Space to note where pictures were taken
- Each crop and how many plants, acres, rows, etc. existed (specifying varieties here can be very beneficial)
- Planting intentions for the remainder of the season
- The name of the inspector(s)

As in Organic inspections the market may require the producer provide farm maps with crops specified on them. Then the inspector can simply visually verify what the producer has submitted reducing the time the inspector is on the farm.